

Draft Minutes (pending approval) of the

**136<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting of the  
Dante Society of America**

Saturday, May 5, 2018, 9:00-10:00am

John J. Burns Library, Boston College – Thompson Room

**President's Welcome**

President Albert Ascoli welcomed the membership and visitors to 136<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting of the Dante Society of America and called the meeting to order at approximately 9:00am.

Ascoli thanked the meeting hosts and fellow officers, in particular Vice President Kristina Olson for carrying additional responsibilities while Ascoli was on leave during portions of the preceding year.

Ascoli also thanked the organizers of the symposium to follow the Annual Meeting, including Kristina Olson and Christopher Kleinhenz, as well as Secretary-Librarian and Boston College Burns Librarian Christian Dupont for hosting the symposium at Boston College.

**Approval of Minutes from the 135<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting**

Secretary-Librarian Christian Dupont reported that a quorum for conducting business at the meeting had been met with the submission of 109 valid proxies and 27 members in attendance, representing a total of 136 votes out of a total of 407 current members who are eligible to vote, or 33.4% (25% is required for a quorum).

Prior to the start of the meeting, Dupont distributed copies of the draft minutes of the 135<sup>th</sup> annual meeting of the Society held on Saturday, May 6, 2016, at the University of Oregon. He invited members present to review them. Dupont called for additions or corrections to the minutes. There being none, approval of the minutes was moved, seconded, and conferred unanimously.

**Treasurer's Report**

Treasurer Michael Sherberg presented a report on the status of the Society's finances.

During the past year, following a decision by Council informed by recommendations from a duly appointed ad hoc Investment Committee, the Society transferred its investment accounts from Merrill Lynch to Vanguard. As of April 29, 2018, the value of the Society's investments in Vanguard mutual funds totaled \$263,937. The monies are distributed between five index funds and a holding account that receives incoming funds,

such as profit-sharing distributions from Johns Hopkins University Press. The Society also now maintains a business checking account with Bank of America for managing routine operational expenditures. As of April 29, the balance in the Bank of America was \$17,970, for a combined balance of \$281,908, rounded to the nearest dollar. At the same time last year, the combined balance of the Society's accounts totaled \$269,893. Thus, the Society realized a net gain of approximately \$12,015, which may be attributed to a combination of factors, including market growth, expense controls, donations, and the timing of bill payments.

The financial statement received just yesterday from our publisher, Johns Hopkins University Press, reported that profit-sharing revenues from the most recent issue of our journal, *Dante Studies* volume 135, which includes membership dues and associated membership management costs, totaled \$22,558, representing an increase of \$4,794 over the revenues earned from volume 134, which totaled \$17,765—a 27% increase.

The Society also receives an annual revenue sharing allocation from JSTOR, an online journal platform that provides electronic access to all issues of *Dante Studies* except for the last five years. For 2017, the Society received \$4,181.20 in revenue from JSTOR. By comparison, the Society received \$4,204.86 from JSTOR the previous year, so approximately the same amount.

### **Audit Committee Report**

Audit Committee chair Christopher Kleinhenz read the report of the Committee regarding its review of records for the 2016 financial year:

The Audit Committee consisting of Guy Raffa, Janet Levarie Smarr, Christian Dupont, and Christopher Kleinhenz (Chair), together with two of the Society's officers—Michael Sherberg (Treasurer) and Kristina Olson (Vice-President)—met via conference call on Sunday, October 29, 2017, to examine the 2016 year-end reports for the accounts of the Dante Society of America as submitted by EMA (Merrill Lynch Wealth Management) and by the Society's Treasurer. The Committee is pleased to report that the books are in order and that the financial health of the Society is sound.

The Committee is pleased to note that the move to the Johns Hopkins University Press continues to be a good investment for the Society, given that revenues are increasing and other aspects of the operation (e.g., maintaining the DSA website and providing membership services) are going well. We expect that the Society will continue to enjoy these benefits for the foreseeable future.

We express our thanks to the DSA officers—Albert Russell Ascoli, Kristina Olson, Michael Sherberg, and Christian Dupont—for their invaluable contributions to the Society and for their expert husbanding of its finances.

Kleinhenz called for a motion to approve the 2016 Audit Committee Report and Treasurer's Report. A motion was made, seconded, and approved.

### **Secretary-Librarian's Report**

Dupont reported that as of May 2, 2018, the Society had 407 members eligible to vote, with a total membership comprised of 427 individual and 6 institutional members (the numbers in parentheses below indicate changes with respect to membership statistics reported at the 2017 Annual Meeting; Life member figures have been adjusted to reflect corrections to individual records and the report criteria):

- Regular = 243 (-10 / -4%)
- Secondary Joint = 3 (+1 / +50%)
- Life (includes former Sustaining Life) = 101 (+5 / +5%)\*
- High School Teacher = 16 (+8 / +100%)
- Student = 50 (+3 / +4%)
- Honorary = 11 (0 / 0%)
- Fellows = 3 (0 / 0%)
- Institutional = 6 (0 / 0%)

\* Adjusted figures

The current geographical distribution of members is as follows:

- United States: 356 (83%)
- Canada: 9 (2%)
- Europe: 50 (12%)
- Foreign/Other: 12 (3%)

Dupont encouraged members and prospective members to take advantage of the online membership registration and renewal options available on the Society's website.

### **Nominating Committee Report**

Arielle Saiber reported on behalf of the Nominating Committee, which she chaired. The other members of the committee were Martin Eisner and Susanna Barsella.

Saiber thanked the members of the Society for nominating strong candidates for the two open positions on Council to be vacated by Kristina Olson and Antonio Rossini at the conclusion of the Annual Meeting. Olson also served as the Society's Vice President for

the past year. Saiber also thanked the four candidates who stood for election for the two vacating seats:

- Francesco Ciabattini, Associate Professor of Italian, Georgetown University
- Peter Hawkins, Professor of Religion and Literature, Yale Divinity School and Yale Institute of Sacred Music
- Olivia Holmes, Professor of Medieval Studies, Binghamton University (SUNY)
- Akash Kumar, Visiting Assistant Professor of Italian Literature, University of California Santa Cruz

Saiber noted that the slate of candidates was generated by members' nominations and the Committee's consideration in balancing rank, gender, and contributions to the field of Dante Studies.

Saiber announced that the Society's membership elected Professors Hawkins and Holmes as the new members of the Council. Both will serve three-year terms in keeping with the Society's bylaws.

Saiber noted that the level of voter participation was virtually identical to last year's, with 131 ballots cast and 1 abstention from a total eligible voting membership of 407 (or 33.4%). Last year, 131 ballots were cast from a total eligible voting membership of 406.

Secretary-Librarian Dupont will initiate an election among the new and continuing Council members during the week following the Annual Meeting to elect a new Vice President for a one-year term from the eligible Council members, in keeping with the Society's bylaws.

### **Prize Committee Report**

Francesca Southerden reported on behalf the Prize Committee, which she chaired. The other members of the committee were Francesco Ciabattini and Jessica Levenstein.

Following the Fall 2017 Council meeting, the prize winners in each category were announced in a message posted to the Society's members-only mailing list and subsequently to the Society's website:

The Dante Prize for the best undergraduate essay on Dante was awarded to Charles East of Princeton University for his original reading of *Inferno* 5, "Slipping through the Cracks: A Study of the Elusive Literal Reading of Dante's Contrapasso for the Lustful."

The Charles Hall Grandgent Award for the best graduate student essay on Dante was presented to Andrés Amitai Wilson of the University of Massachusetts,

Amherst, for his submission, ““For the Love of God’: The Centrality of Bernard of Clairvaux’s Song of Songs Commentaries in Dante’s *Divine Comedy*.”

The second annual Robert M. Durling Prize for excellence in teaching Dante at the secondary level was awarded to Daniel Christian, Upper School English teacher at Gilman School, in Baltimore, for his imaginative, innovative approach to the teaching of Dante, enabling his students to lead themselves through Dante’s poem and fostering creative intellectual engagement with the text and its afterlife.

Following the announcement of the prizes, the Prize Committee worked with Secretary-Librarian Dupont to prepare Mr. Christian’s teaching dossier, which included an annotated syllabus, for publication in the “Pedagogy” section of *Dante Notes* on the Society’s website.

### **President’s Report**

Ascoli reported on achievements of the past year and some of the challenges the Society faces.

It was a very busy and productive year. Some of what has been accomplished has been in structural and technical domains, but other initiatives have focused more on advancing the Society’s mission.

Treasurer Sherberg completed the transfer of the Society’s investment accounts from Merrill Lynch to Vanguard, a process that required much time and effort. The lower investment management fees of Vanguard mutual funds should enable the Society to realize greater growth over the long term while allowing more flexibility for short-term withdrawals.

Over the past year, the Society has received a number of generous donations. Some were larger and others smaller, but all have helped the Society to move forward. The funding of a quasi-endowment to support the Durling Prize is now essentially complete. The Society can begin to look toward other initiatives will require fundraising support.

As Francesca Southerden reported, the Society has awarded the second annual Durling Prize for excellence in teaching Dante at the secondary level. The challenge is to make more teachers aware of the prize and to encourage a greater number of nominations and submissions.

At yesterday afternoon’s Council meeting, Council members voted to establish a new Distinguished Service Award to recognize excellence in service on behalf of the Dante Society of America and the field of Dante Studies in North America over the course of a career. Ascoli called Christopher Kleinhenz to the podium to present him as the inaugural Distinguished Service Award winner. He read the following award citation:

Christopher Kleinhenz, Carol Mason Kirk Professor Emeritus of Italian, University of Wisconsin at Madison, is the recipient of the Dante Society of America's first Distinguished Service Award, which recognizes a career of excellence in service on behalf of the Society and the field of Dante Studies in North America.

Professor Kleinhenz worked tirelessly in several roles to fulfill the multiple mission of the Society: as councilor, editor, bibliographer, and conference organizer. He served as a Council Associate from 1980 to 1985, as Councilor from 1985 to 1991, and as member of the Audit Committee from 2012 to 2017, which he chaired from 2014 to 2016. Contemporaneous with these roles, he served as Co-Editor of *Dante Studies* in 1988, and Editor from 1989 to 2002, publishing a total of sixteen journal issues. Simultaneously, he compiled the Society's bibliography each year from 1984 to 2002, and served as a member of the editorial board of *EBDSA (Electronic Bulletin of the Dante Society of America)* from 1996 to 2015. He organized all DSA-sponsored panels at Kalamazoo for thirty-one years (1982-2013).

Professor Kleinhenz's activity as a scholar was undiminished by this incredible amount of service, both to the Society as well as for other associations (such as his role as President of the American Boccaccio Association and of the American Association for Teachers of Italian). He has authored or edited sixteen volumes, including two encyclopedias, *Medieval Italy: An Encyclopedia* (Routledge, 2004) and the *Dante Encyclopedia* (Garland, 2000), for which he served as Associate Editor to Richard Lansing. He has written over 100 articles and book chapters, the majority of which treat Dante's works. Most recently, he has published *Dante intertestuale e interdisciplinare: saggi sulla «Commedia»* (Rome: Aracne Editrice, 2015), and edited the second volume of the *Approaches to the Teaching of Dante's Comedy* (Modern Language Association of America, forthcoming) with Kristina Olson.

Kleinhenz thanked Ascoli and offered the following impromptu remarks:

I am very moved this award, which is completely unexpected yet much appreciated. I am grateful to many people in the Society and in my department at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. As we will say in the closing remarks of this afternoon's seminar, Dante is worldwide phenomenon. We should feel privileged to teach Dante.

I recognize that a lot of people do service. Since the beginning of my career, I have considered research, teaching, and service to be the three prongs of academic life. The value of service was impressed upon me by my parents, who were not academics: to serve not because we have to, but because we want to. Service

advances institution and leads to the greater good. We work in a great tradition that combines service, teaching, and scholarship.

I can say that I speak for many when I say that I am grateful for ways you have sustained our community.

Ascoli then resumed his report, noting that another initiative gained formal approval at yesterday's Council meeting. For the past several months, Education and Outreach Director Ronald Herzman has discussed with Council members a proposal to create a speakers bureau to be called "Dante on Call." It will begin as a pilot program, with speakers giving presentations at high schools, reading groups, and senior centers.

The Society has begun recording its symposium proceedings in order to make them available to wider audiences. Last year, the University of Oregon provided the resources to videorecord the main symposium sessions. This year, Boston College will do the same. In order to make them easily as well as freely accessing, the Society plans to create its own YouTube channel. The channel will initially presents recordings of symposium presentations, but in type may include other types of audiovisual materials.

The next Annual Meeting and symposium will be held at the University of Toronto, the first time the Society will hold a conference outside the United States. The dates have not yet been set, but they will be sometime in early May. The conference program and local arrangements are being organized by University of Toronto professor Elisa Brillì. The program will focus on visual, sonic, and musical culture in and related to Dante. Council member and New York University professor Alison Cornish will give one of two keynote talks.

Ascoli also recognized and thanked Cornish for serving as chair of the Society's new Bibliography Committee and Brillì for her leadership as the Society's liaison to the Società Dantesca Italiana to negotiate an agreement with the Società Dantesca to collaborate in the production of a new, bilingual version of the *Bibliografia Dantesca Internazionale/International Dante Bibliography*, which was launched in Fall 2017.

A new volume of *Dante Studies* was published in January under editorship of Justin Steinberg, the third since his appointment. A number of submissions are currently undergoing peer review for this year's issue.

In closing, Ascoli thanked Antonio Rossini and Kristina Olson for their service on Council, which for Olson also included serving as Vice President for the past year. Ascoli extended a warm welcome to Peter Hawkins and Olivia Holmes as newly elected Councilors.

## **New Business**

Ascoli opened the floor to questions and new business.

In response to a question about whether it was possible to give a gift membership in the Society, Dupont briefly explained the process and noted that detailed instructions are included in the “Membership and Benefits” section of the Society’s website.

A professor asked whether the “Students Encounters” section of *Dante Notes* might be expanded to include writing by undergraduate and even graduate students. Ascoli suggested talking with *Dante Notes* editor Simone Marchesi and Education and Outreach director Ronald Herzman about adding a new section or sections to *Dante Notes*.

Another professor remarked that he hoped that the Society’s website might encompass multimedia contributions. Ascoli responded by noting that Arielle Saiber and other Councilors and members have also been encouraging the Society to move in this direction. In order to do so, Dupont has noted that he will need assistance to enhance the website and to expand and better organize its offerings. Ascoli suggested that those interested in volunteering their time and talent should contact Dupont.

## **Adjournment**

There being no further business or discussion, Ascoli called for a motion to adjourn the meeting, which was made, second, and approved. The meeting adjourned at 9:55am.

Respectfully submitted,

Christian Dupont  
Secretary/Clerk and Librarian  
The Dante Society of America